

Angels in Pseudo-Philo

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1. Introduction

The long-lost work currently known as the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (L.A.B.) of “Pseudo-Philo” retells biblical history from Adam to the death of Saul in quite distinctive fashion. Scholars have noted that “angels” play a rather significant place in the work overall. Those same authors, however, limit their comments on Pseudo-Philo’s angelology to brief, synthetic remarks.¹ Accordingly, in this essay I propose to systematically and sequentially survey all 59 occurrences of the term *angelus* / *angeli*² in L.A.B.³ In each instance I shall ask such questions as: in what context does the given usage occur?; does the usage have a Biblical basis and, if so, how does Pseudo-Philo deal with the relevant Scriptural data?; and what does the usage have to say about, e.g., the activities of angels and their relationship both to God and to humans?⁴ To

1 For such remarks, see James, *Antiquities* 38-39; Feldman, *Prolegomenon* xlviii-lix; Perrot / Bogaert, *Pseudo-Philon* 59-63; Harrington, *Pseudo-Philo* 301; Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo* 24,261. Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien* and Sullivan, *Wrestling* make only sporadic allusions to Pseudo-Philo’s work while Jacobson, *Commentary* I 241-253 does not refer to angels in his discussion of Pseudo-Philo’s key “themes.” On angelology in post-biblical Judaism overall, see Grözinger, *Engel* III586-596.

2 I draw the list of Pseudo-Philo’s uses of the term from the “General Concordance” of Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo* 286, s.v. In contrast to both the MT and the LXX (as also Josephus), but in line with the usage of the Vulgate, Pseudo-Philo uses different terms, i.e. *angelus* and *nuncius/nuntius* to refer, respectively, to heavenly beings who function, *inter alia*, as God’s envoys and ordinary human emissaries who operate on behalf of a human sender. For instances of the latter term, see L.A.B. 27:6; 39:8; 41:1; 46:2.

3 For the Latin text of L.A.B. (which is generally held to go back to a Hebrew original), I use Harrington, *Pseudo-Philon* 59-387 (with a French translation by J. Cazeaux on facing pages) and for the English translation, Harrington, *Pseudo-Philo* 304-377. I have likewise consulted the annotated translations of Dietzfelbinger, *Pseudo-Philo* 102-264, and of Jacobson, *Commentary* I 89-194.

4 Given the length allotted for this article, I cannot enter fully into all the textual, contextual and traditio-historical aspects of the passages surveyed. For more de-

facilitate the task at hand, I divide up *L.A.B.*'s narrative into five segments as follows: Primeval and ancestral history (chaps. 1-8); Moses (chaps. 9-19); Joshua (chaps. 20-24); the Judges (chaps. 25-48); and Samuel, Saul and David (chaps. 49-65). In a concluding section I shall then attempt to bring together my findings concerning the components of Pseudo-Philo's angelology, particularly in their distinctiveness vis-à-vis the Bible.

2. Primeval and Ancestral History

The term *angelus* / *angeli* is completely absent in the first major section of *L.A.B.*, chaps. 1-8, that rehearses biblical history from Adam to the ancestors' settlement in Egypt. Their absence contrasts with the recurrent mention of angels in the text of Genesis itself. This state of affairs is largely due to the fact that Pseudo-Philo omits very large portions of the Genesis material, including the "angel stories" of Gen 18-19 (the angels' visit to Abraham and role in Sodom's destruction), 21 (the angel's intervention on behalf of the banished Hagar), 22 (the angel's last minute rescue of Isaac)⁵ and 28:10-22 (Jacob's vision of angels on the heavenly ladder). Moreover, when in *L.A.B.* 3:1-2, he reproduces Gen 6:1-4, he does so speaking of the reprobate initiative of the "sons of God" in mating with human women in accordance with MT Gen 6:2 as opposed to an extensive current of tradition (the corrector of Codex Alexandrinus; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.73; Philo, *Gig.* 2.6) that designates the former beings as "angels of God."⁶

3. Moses

The term *angelus* / *angeli* surfaces 14 times in Pseudo-Philo's rendering of the biblical Moses story (Exod 1- Deut 34) in *L.A.B.* 9-19. The first such usage comes in *L.A.B.* 11:5, where in a amplified version of the Sinai theophany account of Exod 19:16-17, he interjects mention of an-

tailed treatment of these questions, I refer readers to the commentaries of Jacobson and Perrot / Bogaert cited in the bibliography.

5 In line with his frequent practice, Pseudo-Philo does introduce references to the *Aqedah* at a later point in his account, most expansively at *L.A.B.* 32:2-4, where, however, the angel(s) assume a quite different role than that assigned the angel in Gen 22 itself; see below.

6 On the story of Gen 6:1-4 within Jewish and Christian tradition, see Sullivan, *Wrestling* 196-225.

gels' "running ahead, until God should establish the Law." Here the angels function to make preparations for God's conveying the Law to Israel – rather than as one finds in the New Testament (see Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2) themselves mediating the Law. Thereafter, angels reappear in *L.A.B.* 15 which recounts the "spy story" of Num 13-14. In Num 14:10 God announces his intention of smiting the people with a pestilence for their unbelief in face of the spies' intimidating report about conditions in the land. Pseudo-Philo (*L.A.B.* 15:5-6) develops this divine announcement into an extended speech by God to Moses containing a threefold, biblically unparalleled, mention of angels. In the first two of those mentions, God speaks of the role – both "active" and "passive" – the angels will be assigned in the punishment of the recalcitrant Israelites: "the angel of my wrath" will burn their bodies, while those angels "who watch over them" will be forbidden to intercede for the people. In the continuation of his discourse, God then recalls his past benefits to the people, these including even his "setting the angels beneath their feet."⁷

The next occurrence of angels within Pseudo-Philo's Moses narrative is in connection with the figure of Balaam in *L.A.B.* 18 (// Num 22-24). They appear initially, in an elaboration (18:5-6) of God's informing Balaam of Israel's blessed state (Num 22:12). In the Pseudo-Philonic rendering God cites to Balaam his own earlier word to "the angels who work secretly." The content of that word, in turn, concerns the favor shown the ancestors Abraham and Jacob, with a reminiscence of the latter's "wrestling ... with the angel who was in charge of hymns" and compelling him to bless him. In this instance Pseudo-Philo interjects a delayed allusion to the story of Jacob's struggle with a figure whom Gen 32:22-32 calls "a man," likewise explicitly qualifying the personage as an "angel."⁸ Subsequently (18:9), he makes triple mention of the angel featured in the story of Balaam's talking she-ass (Num 22:21-35). In his condensed version of the story, the ass beholds the angel (see Num 22:23,25,27), as does Balaam himself⁹ who thereupon "adores" the angel (see Num 22:31) and is told by him to hasten to Balak, given that whatever he says will come about for the king (see Num 22:35).¹⁰

7 On this formulation (which recurs in *L.A.B.* 30:5), see Jacobson, Commentary I 546, who calls attention to its extraordinary character.

8 In his version of Gen 32:22-32, Josephus (*Ant.* 1.332-334) thrice designates Jacob's opponent as an "angel."

9 *L.A.B.* 18:9 does not specify who "opens Balaam's eyes" enabling him to "see" the angel, although the sequence of the verse suggests the angel does this. Num 22:31 attributes the action to God himself.

10 In his compressed version of Num 22:21-35 Pseudo-Philo passes over the more threatening features of the angel's portrayal there, i.e. his taking his position as an

Pseudo-Philo's account of Moses culminates in *L.A.B.* 19 which recounts the leader's farewell discourse to the people, his dialogue with God, and death and burial by God himself. Over the course of the chapter, one finds no less than six mentions of "angel(s)" (of which only the first two have a biblical basis). In 19:5, in the context of his final words to the people (19:1-5), Moses, drawing on the language of LXX Ps 77:25, reminds them that they have eaten "the bread of angels" (*panem angelorum*)¹¹ for forty years. Thereafter, in Moses' intercessory prayer on Mount Abiram (19:8-9), he recalls, in a delayed utilization of Exod 3:2, his having "seen your [God's] angel on fire from the bush." In his response to Moses' prayer (19:10-13) God makes two announcements to him concerning his imminent death and the angels' (non-) involvement therein, both of which underscore the extraordinary stature of Moses. The sequence in 19:12 reads: "... all the angels will mourn over you, and the heavenly hosts will be saddened. But neither angel nor man will know your tomb in which you will be buried¹² until I visit the world." Finally, in 19:16 Pseudo-Philo narrates the fulfillment of what God had announced to Moses concerning the unique circumstances of his death and burial: the angels "mourn at his death" and their "hymn" comes to a stop – a distinction accorded to Moses alone among all human beings in virtue of God's "loving him very much."

4. Joshua

Pseudo-Philo selectively retells the content of the Book of Joshua in *L.A.B.* 20-24. Within these five chapters, the only mention of an angel comes in 24:3, where in the context of his final words to the people, drawn from Josh 24, the dying leader prays, echoing Exod 23:20 ("Behold I [God] send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared for you"), "may he [the Lord] send his angel and guard you."

"adversary" (MT: שֹׁטֵן 22:23), his drawn sword (22:23,31), and his readiness to "slay" the seer, had not the ass turned aside (22:33).

- 11 In MT Ps 78:25 the reference is to the "bread of the mighty ones" (אֲבִירִים) that man ate."
- 12 Deut 34:6b states that "no man knows the place of his [Moses'] burial until this day." Pseudo-Philo extends this "ignorance" also to the angels, thereby underscoring Moses' preeminence.

5. The Judges

Pseudo-Philo's mentions of angel(s) are particularly concentrated (37 out of a total of 59 references, i.e. almost 2/3 of these) in the long segment (*L.A.B.* 25-48) that presents his (often dramatically distinctive) version of the personages and events recounted in the Book of Judges. The distinctiveness of his presentation manifests itself already with the first of the "judges" spoken of by him, i.e. Kenaz. Whereas in Judg 1:13; 3:9 this figure is cited in passing as the younger brother of Caleb and father of the judge Othniel, Pseudo-Philo devotes a four-chapter sequence (*L.A.B.* 25-28) to his exploits, this featuring a total of 10 allusions to angels. The first such allusion comes in 25:2, where an "angel of the Lord" first instructs the people to appoint a leader and then directs them to do so by casting the lot upon the tribe of Caleb – a procedure from which Kenaz emerges as their chief. As Israel's leader, Kenaz's first task is to deal with the reprobate persons and objects (books, stones) that come to light at the start of his tenure and to install engraved stones in the ark of the covenant (25:3-26:15). In the course of this episode, God informs (26:4) Kenaz that "my angel" will deposit the seven idolatrous precious stones of the Amorites in the sea, while "another angel" will procure twelve stones from the place of origin of the first set of stones. Thereafter (26:8) the operations of three different angels are recounted: the first burns the idolatrous books of the Amorites; the second consigns the condemned stones to the sea, while the third brings the replacement stones and engraves the names of the twelve tribes upon these. *L.A.B.* 27 then recounts, under the influence of the story told of Gideon in Judg 7, Kenaz's overthrow of the Amorite camp. In that endeavor, he is assisted by two named, God-sent angels: "Ingethel, who is in charge of hidden things and works invisibly" strikes the Amorites with blindness,¹³ while "Zeruel," "another powerful angel," "preeminent in military might," upholds Kenaz's arms in his rampage through the Amorites' camp.¹⁴ Angels are absent from Pseudo-Philo's account of Kenaz's final initiatives and death (*L.A.B.* 28) as well as from his narrative concerning Israel's second judge,

13 This indication seems inspired by the mention of the "men," i.e. angels (see Gen 19:1) who strike the Sodomites with blindness when they try to force their way into Lot's house in Gen 19:11.

14 For this depiction Pseudo-Philo likely draws on the reference to Aaron and Hur's supporting Moses' upraised hands during the battle against the Amalekites in Exod 17:12. On Pseudo-Philo's non-biblical names for angels here and elsewhere, the equivalents of those names in other works of postbiblical Jewish tradition, and his non-mention of such better-known angelic figures as "Michael" and "Gabriel", see Perrot / Bogaert, Pseudo-Philon 60-63.

"Zebul"¹⁵ in *L.A.B.* 29. They then recur at several junctures in the four chapters (*L.A.B.* 30-33) Pseudo-Philo, considerably amplifying Judg 4-5, dedicates to Deborah. At the opening of this new unit, God (30:1) sends his angel to address the people concerning the vicissitudes of the relationship between himself and them and to announce that a woman will rule them for forty years. Deborah herself addresses the people at length in 30:5-6, reminding them, with a re-utilization of words previously used by God to Moses (see 15:5), of how at the moment of the giving of the Law at Sinai, God had "set the angels beneath their feet" (30:5). Following the Israelite victory over Sisera, due especially to the initiatives of Deborah and Jael, narrated in *L.A.B.* 31 (see Judg 4), Deborah, Barak and the people pronounce (*L.A.B.* 32) a lengthy "hymn" (very loosely) inspired by the "song" of Judg 5. This composition, in turn, commences with an extended reminiscence (32:1-4) of the *Aqedah* episode of Gen 22 that itself exhibits a number of peculiarities. Thus according to 32:1 it was the "envy" of the angels and the heavenly host towards God's favorite Abraham that prompted the Deity to order Abraham to slaughter his son (compare Gen 22:2).¹⁶ Following a survey of their post-Abrahamic history in 32:5-12, the hymn's speakers call (32:13) upon "the angels of the heavenly host" to go inform the deceased ancestors "in their chambers of souls" that God has not forgotten the promises he made them.

The fourth of the leader-figures featured in Pseudo-Philo's version of the Book of Judges is (apparently) a creation of his own (vivid) imagination, i.e. the reprobate Midianite magician named "Aod." As *L.A.B.* 34 tells it, this personage was able to seduce the Israelites into the worship of Midianite gods once he performs the feat of showing them the sun at night. Aod himself obtains his ability to do this "from the angels who were in charge of the magicians" to whom he had been sacrificing and to whom he now "gives orders" (34:2). Those angels, as 34:3 states, had previously had their powers curtailed in punishment

15 This figure is possibly to be identified with the judge "Ehud" of Judg 3:13-30.

16 The above is Pseudo-Philo's substitution for the Bible's own mentions of an angelic involvement in the *Aqedah*; see Gen 22:11,15 where "an angel of the Lord" twice addresses the patriarch "from heaven" with words of instruction and promise (in *L.A.B.* 32:4 God himself becomes the speaker). As the commentators point out, the Pseudo-Philonian motif of angelic envy towards Abraham and God's response to this has a certain counterpart in *Gen. Rab.* 55.4. This midrashic passage cites the dictum of a R. Leazar according to whom the ministering angels called God's attention to Abraham's failure to offer sacrifice to him on the occasion of the great feast he made at Isaac's weaning (see Gen 21:8), whereupon God averred that Abraham would not hesitate to sacrifice even his son if asked to do so. For further references to the motif of angels' "envy" of outstanding humans (e.g. Adam, Henoch) in Jewish tradition, see Grözinger, *Engel* III 592, 594.

for revealing the magical arts to humans (and their intention of “destroying the age without measure”) with the result that they could only operate henceforth via human surrogates like Aod.¹⁷

Whereas “Aod” is biblically unparalleled, Pseudo-Philo’s fifth “judge,” i.e. Gideon in *L.A.B.* 35-36, has his prototype in Judg 6-8.¹⁸ In the MT story of the hero’s call in Judg 6:11-24, mentions of “the angel of the Lord / God” (seven times: 6:11,12,20,21 [*bis*], 22 [*bis*]) as the numerous being that speaks to or otherwise interacts with Gideon alternate with references to the Lord himself functioning in this capacity (two times: 6:14,16). In Pseudo-Philo’s version (*L.A.B.* 35) this “duality” disappears, Gideon’s interlocutor consistently (five times: 35:1,3,5,6,7) being called “the angel (of the Lord”).¹⁹ Thereafter, an angelic presence is missing from his account of Gideon’s later career (*L.A.B.* 36) and that of his reprobate son Abimelech (*L.A.B.* 37), just as it is in these passages’ biblical parallels, i.e. Judg 6:25-8:35 and 9:1-55 respectively.

Angels resurface in the historian’s portrayal (*L.A.B.* 38) of the (unobjectionable) biblical minor judge Jair of Judg 10:3-5 whom he turns into a promoter of Baal worship who orders the burning of the seven men who refuse to participate (38:1-3a). The seven’s plight evokes (38:3b-4) a series of interventions by the “angel Nathaniel, who was in charge of fire”: he extinguishes the fire threatening them, burns Jair’s servants, denounces the miscreant himself in the Lord’s name, burns Jair, demolishes the pillar of Baal, and finally burns up Baal, along with a thousand bystanders.²⁰

17 The wording of *L.A.B.* 34:3 is quite obscure. On the line of thought there and for references to the motif of angels’ illegitimately communicating their magical knowledge to humans elsewhere in Jewish tradition (especially *1 Enoch*), see Jacobson, Commentary II 909-911, and Grözinger, Engel 591.

18 The connection between Aod and Gideon in the sequence of *L.A.B.* lies in the fact that the former brings the Israelites under subjection to the Midianites from which Gideon will subsequently free them.

19 Of the biblical mentions of the angel, Pseudo-Philo passes over those of Judg 6:11 (the angel’s sitting under the oak at Ophrah) and 6:21b (the angel vanishes from Gideon’s sight). In his version of 6:14 in 35:3 he follows, in accord with his consistent practice in the pericope (see above), the LXX against MT in making the angel rather than the Lord the speaker. Finally, in comparison with 6:21 he reduces (35:7) the angel’s direct role in the sign given Gideon, turning the former’s igniting of the hero’s offering by the touch of his staff tip into a reference to the non-commingling of the blood and fire that emerge from the water Gideon has poured on the rock.

20 The above angelic initiatives seem inspired by various biblical contexts dealing with the rescue of the Lord’s adherents and the overthrow of everything and everyone associated with Baal; see Dan 3:26 (Nebuchadnezzar praises the angel who rescued the three young men from the fire into which he threw them when they refuse to worship his image); Judg 6:30 (Gideon has torn down the altar of Baal); 2Kgs 3:2 (Jehoram puts away the pillar of Baal that Ahab erected); 10:25-26 (at Jehu’s orders, the

There is another “angelless” interlude in Pseudo-Philo’s amplified version of the biblical Jephthah story (Judg 10:6-12:7) in *L.A.B.* 39-40 (where he gives enhanced attention to the hero’s daughter and her fate) and his somewhat expanded treatment of the two minor judges Elon and Abdon of Judg 12:13-15 in *L.A.B.* 41 (where their biblical sequence is reversed). By contrast, Pseudo-Philo (*L.A.B.* 42) follows Judg 13 in making multiple (eleven to be precise) references to an angel’s role in the events leading up to the birth of the book’s last judge, i.e. Samson. Exceptionally here as well Pseudo-Philo hews fairly closely to the biblical portrayal of the angel’s various initiatives with regard to both the future mother (Pseudo-Philo gives her the name of “Eluma”) and her husband (Manoah), these culminating in the angel’s ascent to heaven in the flame of the sacrifice that has been offered after his refusal to eat in Manoah’s house (see *L.A.B.* 42:8-10// Judg 13:15-20). At the same time, two noteworthy differences between the respective presentations with regard to the angel should be noted: in the sacrificial scene Pseudo-Philo introduces (42:9) a reminiscence of Judg 6:21 where the angel touches Gideon’s offerings with the tip of his staff,²¹ while at the end of 42:10 he supplies readers with the name of the couple’s angelic visitor, i.e. “Fadahel” – a matter about which both readers and the couple are left in the dark in Judg 13 itself.²²

Angels are absent from Pseudo-Philo’s narrative of Samson’s subsequent career (*L.A.B.* 43, as they are in its *Vorlage*, Judg 14-16). Within the complex *L.A.B.* 25-48, they make a final appearance in the prayer

Baal worshipers are slaughtered in the house of Baal in Samaria; the pillar of Baal in that sanctuary is burned and demolished, and the house itself is turned into a latrine).

- 21 In his own version of the episode of Gideon’s call in *L.A.B.* 35, Pseudo-Philo does not utilize the notice of Judg 6:21, opting rather to transfer it to the analogous case of Manoah’s offering before the angel of Judg 13. Strikingly, Josephus (see *Ant.* 5.284) makes the same “transfer” (although he, in contrast to Pseudo-Philo, has no equivalent to the whole sequence of Judg 6:17-24 concerning Gideon’s offering and the angel’s dealings with this).
- 22 In Judg 13:18 the angel replies evasively to Manoah’s question of 13:16 about his name: “Why do you ask my name seeing that it is wonderful (פלא)?” Harrington, Pseudo-Philo 356, n.o holds that Pseudo-Philo’s Latin name for the angel (“Fadahel”) ultimately goes back to the Hebrew adjectival form פִּלְאֵי of Judg 13:18. His proposal is seconded by Jacobson, Commentary II 992-993. Earlier on in 42:10 Pseudo-Philo, in a reworking of the parenthetical notice of Judg 13:16 (“for Manoah did not know that he was the angel of the Lord”) has Manoah tell his wife that he had not known that the (now ascended) angel was “the minister of God” (*minister Dei*), a title applied to angels only here in *L.A.B.* (Compare 30:1, where the phrase “ministers of the Lord” is used in reference to Moses and Joshua and 32:9,10,14, where the heavenly bodies are said to function as “ministers” in the relationship between God and Israel).

that Phineas offers in response to the Israelites' second defeat at the hands of the recalcitrant Benjamites in *L.A.B.* 47:1; in the prayer the priest recalls that when the people threatened him for his slaying of the apostate Israelite and his paramour (see Num 25:14-15), "you [God] sent your angel and killed from them twenty-four thousand men."²³

6. Samuel, Saul, David

The final segment of *L.A.B.*, i.e. chaps. 49-65, represents Pseudo-Philo's equivalent to 1Sam with Samuel, Saul, and David as its three main characters. Within the segment, one may distinguish a first sub-section in chaps. 49-53 telling of Samuel's youth and corresponding to 1Sam 1-3. The only references to angels in this material are found in chap. 53 (// 1Sam 3), the narrative of Samuel's call. In his retelling of the episode Pseudo-Philo introduces a two-fold angelic allusion. In 53:4 Eli declares to the boy Samuel who has come to him after hearing God's voice (see 1Sam 3:4-5) that a triple call in the night signifies that an angel is speaking. Thereafter, in 53:6, following Samuel's second approach to him (see 1Sam 3:6), Eli, quoting the priest Phineas, states: "The right ear hears the Lord by night, but the left an angel."²⁴

Pseudo-Philo's selective rendition (*L.A.B.* 54-58) of the section 1Sam 4-15 (the loss and recovery of the ark, the designation of Saul as king, and his condemnation for failing to exterminate the Amalekites), like the Bible itself, lacks mention of angels. Those figures do, on the other hand, surface in his narrative of the anointing of David (*L.A.B.* 59// 1Sam 16) into which he introduces a lengthy "song" by the newly anointed youth in which he avers (59:4) that God has "delivered me to

23 In Num 25:6-9 a "plague" wipes out 24,000 of the Israelites prior to Phineas' move against the Israelite and his Midianite paramour and it is not said that the Israelites were ready to kill Phineas for his deed. Pseudo-Philo's citation of Phineas' prayer (*L.A.B.* 46:4 *in fine*-47:2), God's response to this (47:3-7) explaining why he has allowed the reprobate Benjamites to prevail over the Israelites, and the appended account of the priest's ascension (48:1-2) represents his elaboration of the parenthetical notice of Judg 20:27 on Phineas' ministering before the Ark at Bethel (to which the Israelites repair after their first defeat by the Benjamites). The foregoing "Phineas material" is itself incorporated by Pseudo-Philo into his rendition (*L.A.B.* 44-48) of the two juxtaposed narratives with which the Book of Judges ends, Judg 17-18 (Micah's idol) and 19-21 (the Gibeah outrage and the resultant civil war).

24 This declaration, in turn, is the basis for Eli's associated instruction to Samuel that he should now pay attention with his right ear and respond that he is ready to listen, but be "deaf" with his left ear, merely coming and reporting to Eli any sensation that he may receive on that side. On the background of and possible parallels to the above association of an angel with the left ear, see Jacobson, *Commentary II* 1121-1122.

his angels and to his guardians (*custodibus suis*) that they should guard me." Angels likewise are cited in Pseudo-Philo's version of the story of David's overthrow of Goliath (1Sam 17) in *L.A.B.* 61. Specifically, in connection with the biblical reference (17:40) to David's selecting the stones that he will use against the giant, Pseudo-Philo interjects (61:5) a mention of God's dispatching "Zervihel."²⁵ Subsequently (61:8) the mortally wounded Goliath, when called on by David to open his eyes and behold his (true) slayer, does "see an angel" and acknowledges that he has been slain, not simply by David but by one "whose appearance is not like the appearance of a man." Having thus dealt with Goliath, the angel, according to 61:9 likewise changes the victor David's own appearance so that no one recognizes him.²⁶

Following another "angel-free" unit in *L.A.B.* 62-63 (the interactions between David and Jonathan [see 1Sam 18-20]) and Saul's killing of the priests of Nob [see 1Sam 22:11-23]), Pseudo-Philo makes his final mention of angels in the penultimate chapter of his work, *L.A.B.* 64 (// 1Sam 28), just prior to his account of Saul's death in *L.A.B.* 65 (see 1Sam 31 and 2Sam 1). The reference in question comes in 64:6 where the medium, responding to Saul's question about the appearance of the one she is seeing, first states: "You are asking me about divine beings (*de diis*)."²⁷ Within this group she then distinguishes between the returned Samuel (whose "appearance is not the appearance of a man") and the two angels [who] are leading him."

7. Other Possible References to Angels

In addition to the foregoing, explicit mentions of "angel(s)," there are a number of further instances in Pseudo-Philo where an allusion to these figures is probable or possible which I shall now briefly survey. In *L.A.B.* 9:10 Miriam reports to her parents that a "man in a linen garment" had appeared to her and announced the birth of a child (Moses) through whom God will deliver his people from their slavery in Egypt.

25 This angelic figure is generally identified with "Zeruel, the angel who is pre-eminent in military might" cited in *L.A.B.* 27:10 as one of two angels who assist Kenaz in his battle against the Amorites.

26 Pseudo-Philo's interjection of this notice is designed to address the anomaly posed by 1Sam 17:55-58, where, after his extensive interactions with him in what precedes, Saul appears not to know who David is. In Pseudo-Philo's presentation in 61:9 the king's seeing David and asking who he is following Goliath's death "makes sense" given the angel's foregoing change of the youth's appearance.

27 The woman's reference to "gods" here corresponds to the use of a grammatically plural form (MT אלהים, LXX θεοίς) by her biblical counterpart in 1Sam 28:13.

Given the reminiscence here of Dan 10:5 with its mention of “a man clothed in linen” who is clearly an angel, Miriam is likely referring to an angelic apparition as well. Next, in 11:12 in the context (see 11:6-13) of his communicating the ten commandments to the people God warns them not to testify falsely “lest your guardians (*custodes tui*) speak false testimony against you.” Commentators generally take the references here to be to “guardian angels” (so Harrington, Pseudo-Philo 319, n. k; Stuckenbruck, Angel Veneration 170-173; Harrington, “‘Angels’ and ‘God’” 66-67), but Jacobson (Commentary I 475-476) questions this understanding, given the difficulty of the notion of angels perjuring themselves in this way and further suggests that the text is corrupt.²⁸ Subsequently, God, speaking to Moses in 13:6, prescribes that on the feast of trumpets there is to be “an offering for your watchers (*prospeculatoribus*).” Harrington (Pseudo-Philo 321, n. e) avers that “angelic guardians are probably meant,” but Jacobson (Commentary I, 512-513) here again, sees a reference to human rather than to angelic figures.²⁹

In the Kenaz segment (*L.A.B.* 25-28) God (26:12) informs the hero that the (twelve precious) stones which he is to place in the ark alongside the tablets of the covenant will remain there until “Jahel, who will build a house for my name, will arise” and set the stones upon the two cherubim as an enduring memorial for Israel. In a note to this passage, Harrington (Pseudo-Philo 338, n. e) mentions two possible identifications for “Jahel” here: King Solomon (one of whose ten names is “Ithiel” in rabbinic tradition) or the angel “Jaol” cited in *Apoc. Ab.* 10:4,9); Jacobson (Commentary II 773) emphatically rejects the latter suggestion in favor of the former.³⁰ By contrast, an additional reference to angels seems clear in *L.A.B.* 32:7 where the “hymn of Deborah” recalls that at Mount Sinai “the heavenly hosts (*militie*) speeded the lightnings”; compare the mention of the “angels running ahead” in the account of the Sinai theophany in 11:5. Finally, in 33:5 Deborah, in her farewell discourse to them, assures the Israelites that after their deaths the righteous “will be like the stars of heaven.” Whereas Michael

28 Specifically, Jacobson suggests that Pseudo-Philo originally wrote שבניך (“your [human] neighbor”) that was corrupted to שמריך (“your [angelic] watchers/guardians”) in the course of the text’s transmission.

29 In particular, Jacobson translates the phrase in question (read by him in accordance with the emendation of M.R. James that divides up the *prospeculatoribus* of the MSS. into two words, i.e. *pro speculatoribus*) as “on behalf of / as thanks for your watchmen,” further noting that “watchmen” here could be taken either in a literal or metaphorical (“prophets”) sense.

30 An angelic interpretation of the name is likewise questioned by Hannah, Michael 53 n. 126.

Mach³¹ sees this statement as reflecting the expectation of a “*Verwandlung des Gerechten zum Engel*” attested also, e.g., in Luke 20:36, Harrington (Pseudo-Philo 348, n. e) and Jacobson (Commentary II 904) take the formulation more “literally” as affirming that the deceased righteous will be numbered among the stars of heaven.

Among the above texts then *L.A.B.* 9:10 and 32:5 can rather assuredly be regarded as additional Pseudo-Philonic references to angels, whereas such a reference is open to question in the remaining instances.

8. Conclusion

Having surveyed all uses of the term *angelus/angeli* in Pseudo-Philo as well as other possible allusions to angels there, I shall now attempt to synthesize the results of this survey, particularly for what concerns the relationship between *L.A.B.*’s angelology and that of the Bible itself. We began by pointing out (see n. 2) that, unlike the Bible, Pseudo-Philo has a special term (*angelus*) for heavenly “angels” that he does not use of human messengers; thereby he accentuates the super-human otherness of the beings whom he so designates. At the same time, we further noted that angel terminology is not distributed evenly over the historian’s work. Completely absent in his account of the primeval and ancestral periods (*L.A.B.* 1-8), such references are concentrated in his narrative of the Mosaic and Judges epochs, *L.A.B.* 9-19 and 25-48, respectively. As for the biblical basis for Pseudo-Philo’s mention of angels, we have observed considerable variety in this regard. In a few cases (Balaam, Gideon, Samson) he follows the Bible both in where it speaks of angels and what it says concerning them. Elsewhere, Pseudo-Philo repositions biblical angel references in a new setting; see, e.g., *L.A.B.* 19:9 where the notice on the angel’s speaking to Moses from the burning bush that in the Bible occurs at the start of his career in Exod 3:2 becomes a reminiscence of this happening that Pseudo-Philo places on Moses’ lips as part of his exchange with God just prior to his death. In the related case of *L.A.B.* 18:5, Pseudo-Philo both recontextualizes the story of Jacob’s nocturnal conflict of Gen 32:22-32 as part of a divine discourse to Balaam, and explicitly identifies the patriarch’s opponent, whom Genesis itself calls simply a “man,” with “the angel in charge of hymns”; see also on 64:6. Going still further in this direction Pseudo-Philo, on occasion, not only repositions biblical mentions of angels, but

31 Mach, Entwicklungsstadien 166-167.

give these a whole new content. A case in point is the lengthy allusion (32:1-4) to the *Aqedah* episode of Gen 22 with which the “hymn of Deborah” cited in *L.A.B.* 32 commences. Whereas in the biblical chapter an angel twice (Gen 22:15,18) addresses Abraham “from heaven” concerning the sacrifice of his son in Pseudo-Philo God ends up speaking directly to the patriarch (32:4) and the angels’ role in the happening is that of “enviers” of God’s favorite Abraham (32:1) with the result that God resolves to put his fidelity to the test. In all of the above instances, Pseudo-Philo’s notices concerning angels do have a biblical basis of some sort. Still more often, however, the historian introduces angels into his narration without any such biblical warrant (see e.g., *L.A.B.* 25-28 [Kenaz]; 34 [Aod] and 38 [Jair]), while conversely, of course, he simply omits numerous biblical “angel episodes” found in Gen – 1Sam (e.g., Gen 16,18-19,21,28). In sum then, his handling of the angel thematic is reflective of Pseudo-Philo’s overall tendency to treat the biblical record with great freedom, as exemplified in his additions to as well as his omissions from and rearrangements of that record.

Beyond the more “formal” and terminological aspects of Pseudo-Philo’s angelology noted above, our study yielded certain indications concerning its content side, i.e. the characteristics of angels, their functions and their relationship both to God and humans. On these points, the following findings are of note. Some at least of Pseudo-Philo’s angels have names (“Ingethel” and “Zeruel” [27:10], “Nathaniel” [38:3], “Fadahel” [42:10], and “Zervihel” [61:5]). These are not, however, biblical angelic names, just as the Bible’s own occasional names for angels (Michael, Gabriel) are not utilized by the historian. Following *LXX Ps* 78:25, he refers (19:5) without further elaboration, to “the bread of angels,” even while he leaves aside the reference, found in Gen 18:8, to the three men (angels) eating what Abraham places before them. In the likely allusion to an angel’s appearance to her by Miriam in 9:10 (see above), that angel, in line with Dan 10:5, is spoken of as being clad “in a linen garment.” Elsewhere, however, Pseudo-Philo provides no indications concerning the visual aspect of angels, other than the negative remark in 61:9 that the appearance of “Zervihel” (see 61:5) “was not like the appearance of a man.”

Pseudo-Philonic angels perform multiple functions, most of which have some sort of biblical basis. Vis-à-vis God himself, one hears of the songs and hymns they regularly perform in his presence (see 18:6; 19:6). The Deity, in turn, favors “the angels who work secretly” with an advance announcement concerning his intentions with regard to Abraham and Jacob; see 18:5-6 (where the content of this communication is disclosed by God to Balaam), even as he withholds from the angels, as

he does from humans, the whereabouts of Moses' burial place (see 19:12).

It is especially, however, the manifold activities of angels as God's operatives in the human sphere that are the focus of attention in Pseudo-Philo's mentions of them. As in the Bible, angels in *L.A.B.* bring communications from God to human recipients (e.g., the parents to be of Samson in chap. 43), and Pseudo-Philo shows a certain interest in the specifics of the process (see 53:4,6 where angels are said to call their hearers three times at night and to speak in their left ears).

Angels further serve to prepare God's appearance at Sinai (see 11:5; 32:7). They act as guardians and protectors of the whole Israelite people and of its leading individual members, especially in life-threatening situations of battle and persecution (see 20:24 [the people]; 27:10 [Kenaz]; 38:3 [the seven faithful Israelites]; 59:4; 62:8 [David]). More specifically, the angel "Zervihel" transforms the appearance of his *protégé* David (62:8); angels join the mourning for Moses, even suspending their heavenly songs to do so (19:12,16); an angel procures and engraves the precious stones that Kenaz is to place in the ark (26:4,8); and two angels serve as attendants to Samuel when his spirit returns to earth (64:6). Angels likewise benefit humans by their intercession for them; see 15:5 where God informs Moses that he will (temporarily) put a halt to their doing so, given the people's lack of faith.

Over against such positive initiatives that angels undertake at God's direction for the benefit of deserving humans stand other instances in Pseudo-Philo where angels exercise punitive and destructive roles. The "angel of my [God]'s wrath" is to "afflict their [the recalcitrant Israelites'] bodies with fire in the wilderness" (15:5). Later, "Nathaniel, the angel who was in charge of fire" burns up the servants of the reprobate judge Jair, Jair himself, and the thousand men who had congregated around Baal. Even as Phineas recalls (47:1) God's angel slaying the 24,000 Israelites who wished to kill him for his zealous deed. Such eliminatory activity by angels extends also to illicit objects and even deities: an angel burns the idolatrous books of the Amorites, and another flings their precious stones into the sea (26:4,8), while "Nathaniel" demolishes Baal's pillar and burns Baal himself (38:4). In all these cases angels are acting as God's agents when perpetrating harm. In *L.A.B.* 34, however, a group of angels disclose their magical knowledge to humans without God's authorization (and even intend to "destroy the age without measure"), are punished by God for doing so, and eventually endow the reprobate Aod with the miraculous capacities that enable him to lead the Israelites into worship of the Midianite gods and enslavement by Midian. Here then, certain angels act in ways that are

inimical to the interests of both God and Israel. On one occasion as well, Pseudo-Philo reports an instance of angelic animosity toward a human favored by God, i.e. the angels' "envy" of Abraham (32:1) that sets them in opposition to God as well and gives rise to a threat of death for Isaac. More ambiguous is the case of the angel who wrestles with Jacob according to 18:6: as in the Bible itself (see Gen 32:22-32), his assault upon the patriarch is not said to be God-initiated and yet it leads to Jacob's obtaining a "blessing." Angels thus interact – virtually always at God's direction – with humans and their world in multiple ways in *L.A.B.*, dispensing benefits but also harm to those with whom they deal. At the same time, Pseudo-Philo seems to work with the idea that a given angel (or group of angels) has a specific, particular work to perform that is reserved for him alone. Thus, God assigns three different angels to carry out his purposes with regard to the Amorite books and precious stones and the stones that will be placed in the ark (see 26:4,8), just as in the battle against the Amorites "Ingethel" smites the enemy with blindness while "Zeruel" supports Kenaz's arms (27:10).³²

Overall, angels in *L.A.B.* (as in the Bible) are represented as clearly superior to humans in terms of knowledge, power, and status vis-à-vis God. Strikingly, however, Pseudo-Philo seems to reverse this hierarchy on various occasions – none of them with a biblical counterpart. Twice (15:5; 30:5) – both times in connection with the Sinai theophany – there is reference to angels' being "set beneath Israel's feet." Moreover, in 32.13 Deborah and the Israelites as part of their extended "hymn" actually command the angels to be their messengers in bringing word to the souls of the fathers that God has not forgotten his promises. Similarly, in the face of the angels' envy of Abraham (32:1), God acts to vindicate his favorite, just as he imposes mourning for Moses on the entire angelic host (19:12,16) and withholds from the angels, just as much as from Moses' fellow humans, all knowledge of the leader's burial place (19:12). Elements of this sort highlight the exalted standing of Israel (and its leading figures) for Pseudo-Philo – a standing that sometimes seems to transcend that of the angels themselves.³³

Pseudo-Philo was a markedly creative reteller of biblical history. His creativity manifests itself also in his multi-faceted handling of the Bible's "angel data" that this essay has sought to trace in systematic

³² On the point, see Jacobson, Commentary II 792 who notes that Rabbinic tradition evidences a similar conception about the angelic division of labor.

³³ The idea that in certain instances and in certain respects humans are superior to angels in God's eyes is paralleled elsewhere in Jewish tradition; for references, see Grözinger, Engel III 594.

fashion over the whole extent of *L.A.B.*³⁴ To my knowledge, the essay is the first such attempt; as such it certainly leaves room for further investigation, nuancing and correction.

Abstract

This essay represents the first systematic study of Pseudo-Philo's angelology takes into account all uses of the term *angelus* / *angeli* in *L.A.B.* Among its findings are the following: Unlike the MT and LXX, Pseudo-Philo differentiates terminologically between human and super-human "messengers." His retelling of biblical history from Adam to the death of Saul omits many of the Bible's angel episodes, recontextualizes others, and introduces a whole series of references to angels that lack any kind of source basis. The names he gives to his various angels do not appear in the Bible; conversely, the biblical angel names "Michael" and "Gabriel" are not cited by him. As in the Bible, Pseudo-Philo's angels are generally faithful executors of God's designs – whether benign or punitive – in the human sphere, just as they are clearly superior to the humans with whom they interact. On occasion, however, the historian's portrait of the angels diverges from both these "norms": the angels "envy" God's favorite Abraham and a group of them not only divulges the magic arts to humanity without divine authorization, but even aims to "destroy the world without measure", at the same time, the angels are twice said to have been "placed under Israel's feet" and God constrains the entire angelic host to join in the mourning for a human, i.e. Moses, whose burial place he keeps secret from them, just as much as he does from Moses' fellow humans. Finally, Pseudo-Philo seems to operate with the notion, attested also in Rabbinic tradition, that each angel (or group of angels) has his particular God-assigned task that is to be done by him alone.

³⁴ As has been pointed out over the course of this essay, certain features of Pseudo-Philo's angelology in which he differs from/goes beyond that of the Bible itself, e.g., the names given to various angels (see n. ¹⁴), the envy of Abraham attributed to the angels (see n. ¹⁶), the angels' unauthorized transmission of their magical knowledge to humans (see n. ¹⁷), and the notion of an angelic division of labor (see n. ³¹), have their counterparts elsewhere in Jewish tradition. The topic needs more extended investigation.

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